



THE STATUS OF INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY IN CENTRAL ASSAM: A STUDY ON ITS PRESENCE, PERFORMANCE, AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the status of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in Central Assam, focusing on its reach, infrastructure, enrollment patterns, academic programs, and challenges faced by its study centers. As a key player in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in India, IGNOU has played a crucial role in democratizing higher education. In Central Assam, which includes the districts of Nagaon, Morigaon, Hojai, Dima Hasao, East Karbi Anglong, and West Karbi Anglong, IGNOU's study centers contribute significantly to expanding educational access, especially for underserved populations. The paper aims to present a balanced evaluation of IGNOU's performance and relevance in this region.

KEYWORDS: IGNOU, Central Assam, Open and Distance Learning, Study Centers, Enrollment, Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), established in 1985, is India's largest distance education provider. Its mission is to offer accessible, flexible, and cost-effective education to all sections of society. In a region like Central Assam—characterized by ethnic diversity, geographic isolation in parts, and socio-economic challenges—IGNOU has become a vital channel for educational empowerment. This study seeks to assess the current status of IGNOU in Central Assam and evaluate its contribution to regional development through education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this paper are to analyze the distribution and infrastructural status of IGNOU study centers in Central Assam, to assess enrollment trends and academic performance, and to identify major challenges faced by IGNOU centers in this region.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on data collected from five IGNOU study centers located across six districts of Central Assam: Nagaon, Morigaon, Hojai, Dima Hasao, and East and West Karbi Anglong. Data were gathered through:

- Institutional records and reports,
- Interviews with academic counselors and coordinators,
- Surveys of enrolled students using convenience sampling.

Major Findings of the Study

Study Centers Distribution and Infrastructure

IGNOU has five functional study centers in Central Assam, strategically located to serve both urban and rural learners. These centers are mostly hosted within local colleges and educational institutions. District wise study centers were shown in the below table.

Sl. No.	District	Study Center
1	Dima Hasao	Haflong Govt. College
2	Hojai	Rabindra Nath Tagore University
3	Morigaon	Jagiroad College
4	Karbi Anglong	Diphu Govt. College
5	Nagaon	Nowgong College

Table 1: District Wise study Centers of IGNOU in Central Assam

Coordinators of all IGNOU study centers expressed general satisfaction with the core infrastructure such as classrooms, libraries, and IT facilities. However, they emphasized the lack of separate buildings and transportation facilities as significant drawbacks. Learners also appreciated facilities like computer labs, internet services, and libraries, while the basic infrastructure—classrooms, administrative offices, and internet connectivity—is present in all centers, disparities remain in:

- Access to multimedia resources,
- Quality of library services,
- Availability of full-time academic support staff.

The centers in urban hubs like Nagaon are relatively better equipped than those in remote areas like Dima Hasao.

Academic Programs Offered in Different Study Centers of IGNOU

The study found steady enrollment over the past five years, especially in programs like:

- Bachelor of Arts (B.A.),
- Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.),
- Bachelor of Social Work (BSW),
- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Sociology, Political Science, and Education,

- Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (DECE).

Most students come from rural, tea garden, tribal, and economically weaker sections. The gender ratio has shown gradual improvement, with more women enrolling in recent years, especially in B.Ed. and DECE programs.

IGNOU study center in Haflong College offers the most diverse range of programs with 26 total programs. It has a wide selection of UG courses as BPP, CHR, BA, BCM, BTS, PG courses MCOM, MEC, MAH and Diploma/Certificate courses CTE, CDM, DTS.

Rabindra Nath Tagore University's, IGNOU study center offers 10 total programmes; primarily focusing on UG course -BPP, BAG, BCOM and PG courses -MEG, MAH, MPS. It has a minimal offering of Diploma/Certificate courses of CFE.

IGNOU study center of Diphu Govt. College offers 11 total programs. The UG programs are BA (ENG) and BAVTM, while PG courses like MEG, MHD, and MAH dominate the offerings. Diploma/Certificate programs include only CIT.

IGNOU study center in Jagiroad College offers 11 total programs with balanced representation across UG, PG, and Diploma/Certificate levels. UG programs include BA (ENG), while PG programs include MHD and specialized certificates like CES, CDM, and CIT.

IGNOU study center in Nowgong College offers total 12 programs. UG courses include BAFC, BAVTM, and BSW. The only PG program is MSO, and the center offers a significant variety of Diploma/Certificate courses such as DCE, CDM, and DNHE.

Academic Support and Student Services

Student support services in IGNOU study centers include: Personal Contact Programs (PCPs), Counseling sessions, Practical workshops for select courses. However, several limitations were noted: Inconsistent scheduling of PCPs, Irregular attendance of academic counselors, delayed delivery of printed learning materials, Limited use of ICT tools and online resources.

These gaps reduce the overall effectiveness of IGNOU's learner support in remote parts of Central Assam.

IGNOU's Role in Regional Development

Despite challenges, IGNOU has played a transformative role in Central Assam by empowering first-generation learners, enhancing employability through vocational and teacher education, promoting inclusive education for tea tribes and tribal groups, supporting women's education through flexible study models.

Its presence has also encouraged lifelong learning among adult learners and working professionals.

Challenges and Limitations

IGNOU's study centers in Central Assam face a number of

systemic and contextual challenges, like inadequate physical infrastructure in some centers, shortage of qualified academic counselors, and lack of internet access for online learning components, communication barriers in multilingual regions, bureaucratic delays in admission, re-registration, and result declaration. These issues impact student satisfaction and learning outcomes.

Challenges faced by the Co-ordinators at IGNOU study centers Infrastructure-related issues are a problem for 20% of the coordinators. Problems related to study materials affect 40% of the co-ordinators. In IGNOU study centers none of the co-ordinators were faced problems in counselling sessions Administrative problems like filling out forms and the non-receipt of hall tickets, along with communication challenges, seem well-handled, 40% of coordinators reporting issues in these areas. Assignments create problems for 40% of coordinators, while 20% face result-related issues and 40% faced ICT challenges. Financial problems are reported by none of the co-ordinators, while salary-related issues affect 20% of the coordinators. Especially, 100% of the coordinators report receiving full support from their head institution and do not face other major challenges in managing

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the role of IGNOU in Central Assam, the following measures are suggested:

- Improve physical and digital infrastructure in study centers,
- Regular training for academic counselors,
- Strengthen collaboration with local educational institutions and NGOs,
- Increase regional language support in instructional materials,
- Enhance awareness about IGNOU programs through community outreach.

CONCLUSION

IGNOU's contribution to educational expansion in Central Assam is significant, particularly in reaching marginalized groups. However, to maintain and improve its impact, concerted efforts are needed to overcome infrastructure, resource, and administrative challenges. With adequate policy support and localized strategies, IGNOU can further its mission of democratizing higher education in this socio-economically diverse region.

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